

THE “EXTENDED INITIAL EDUCATION” DIMENSION OF POSTCOMPULSORY PATHWAYS IN A QUEENSLAND REGIONAL COMMUNITY

Bobby Harreveld and P. A. Danaher
Central Queensland University

and
Máirín Kenny
Independent Scholar
Ireland

ABSTRACT

This paper examines current vocational education delivery and school-to-industry links in a Queensland regional community as a framework for interrogating the Queensland Government’s (2002) *Education and training reforms for the future* agenda. The paper also identifies the responsibilities of multiple stakeholders if this agenda is to fulfil its lifelong-learning promise.

INTRODUCTION

Gorard’s (2002) “model of the ‘two dimensions of time’” distinguishes usefully between “extended initial education” (“initial schooling and consecutive near-continuous episodes of post-compulsory education or training”) and “later learning” (“episodes of education or training taken after a break from continuous education and training following school-leaving age”). Gorard contends that British lifelong learning is currently “robbing Peter to pay Paul”, by devoting attention and resources to “extended initial education” and neglecting the educational opportunities of participants in “later learning”.

This paper applies Gorard’s model to the findings of a study conducted in the first half of 2003 in a Queensland regional community (Harreveld, Kenny, & Danaher, 2003). Specifically, we examine the “extended initial education” dimension of postcompulsory pathways towards lifelong learning, as manifested in the current delivery of vocational education and training (VET) and school-to-industry links in that community. We argue that VET delivery in schools and industry highlights both difficulties and opportunities that must be recognised and addressed if not only the economic value of learning is considered, but also the equally important social value of learning in its own right is to be realised.

We illustrate this argument by referring to the possibilities and problems associated with the implementation of the Queensland Government’s (2002) *Education and training reforms for the future* (ETRF), currently being trialled in the regional community cited above.

On the one hand, ETRF is posited on the creation and extension of postcompulsory pathways towards lifelong learning, whereby school leavers will be “earning” or “learning”. On the other hand, structural “roadblocks” and dissonant attitudes and expectations might derail this ambitious “extended initial education” initiative. There are significant responsibilities and contributions required of and from multiple stakeholders if such an outcome is to be averted.

Our juxtaposition of the notions of lifelong learning and a compulsory senior secondary phase of learning under the umbrella of “extended initial education” (Gorard, 2002) is a tactical decision that enables us to investigate the relationships between these notions. On the one hand, we can argue that each embodies the material means and methods by which young people are constructed as part of a wider, market-oriented, entrepreneurial education corporation. On the other hand, we could claim that both notions work together to contest a socio-historical hegemony of university learning in the postcompulsory years. An emerging critique of the ETRF agenda implementation processes is its lack of a holistic view of the senior years of schooling. There is a perceived preoccupation with uncoordinated, piecemeal funding allocations for short-term projects that are targeted towards specific categories of young people who are framed as deficit in either motivation and/or ability to participate in the learning and earning pathways being made available to them. Through the lens of our recent research into VET initiatives in the senior secondary phase of learning (Harreveld, Kenny, & Danaher, 2003), this binary is useful for our purposes in the following section where we

briefly examine the forces impacting on teachers and administrators of secondary schools who are charged with the implementation of a government's political agenda.

LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFORMS FOR THE FUTURE AGENDA

The notion of postcompulsory pathways for lifelong learning takes its meaning from its binary opposite – compulsory pathways. Fundamental to changes enacted through the Queensland Government's (2002) ETRF agenda is a conceptual shift from the notion of "compulsory schooling" to a notion of "compulsory learning in a senior phase of schooling". Significantly, it is the learning under the auspices of a school, not the location of that learning in a school, that is compulsory.

This shift has been achieved through:

1. reviews of senior secondary schooling and of VET with accompanying reports, e.g., *The senior certificate: A new deal* (Pitman, 2002), *The review of pathways articulation through the post-compulsory years of school to further education, training and labour market participation* (Gardner, 2002);
2. the passing of legislation (*Youth participation in education and training bill*, 2003);
3. the ongoing articulation of national and state policy positions, e.g., *VET for school students in Queensland: A draft policy statement* (Queensland Department of Employment and Training, 2003);
4. pilot projects trialling two major aspects of the ETRF –
 - a) the development of Senior Education and Training Plans (SETPs) with Year 10 students, and
 - b) the development and implementation of District Youth Achievement Plans (DYAPs) (Reay, 2003).

The focus of these changes is (initially) young people between 15 and 17 years of age. The legislation defines a young person's "compulsory participation phase" as starting "when the person stops being of compulsory school age" (i.e., the chronological age of 15 years) and as ending when the person,

- (i) gains a senior certificate or Certificate III, or

- (ii) has participated in eligible options¹ for two years after the person stopped being of compulsory school age, or
 - (iii) turns 17.
- (Queensland Government, 2002, p. 13)

This means not only that the period of initial education is extended for a minimum of two years, but also that young people *must* be either "earning" (option (ii) above) or "learning" (option (i) above) or a combination of both (options (i) and (ii) above). From this compulsory senior secondary phase of learning, young people would proceed to avail themselves of the postcompulsory pathways available via the articulation processes among the higher-education and VET sectors and their institutionalised systems.

These initiatives represent a political and policy "shop-front" that could lead the casual observer to think that nothing had been happening in the nation or the state of Queensland with respect to postcompulsory pathways until this century. The truth is quite the contrary; changes to educational pathways provision linked to lifelong learning opportunities have been implemented in Australia via the politics and policies of governments of the day since the fundamental changes to the economy and workforce organization of the 1980s and 1990s (Australian National Training Authority, 1998; Finn, 1991). Consequent pedagogical changes were initially wrought via enforced implementation of a particular curriculum orientation (competency-based education) and specifically sanctioned industry partnerships, plus multimodal delivery platforms for teaching and learning which celebrated the notion of "flexible" learning (Australian National Training Authority, 2000).

Predicated as it was upon a fundamental belief that VET's primary purpose is to contribute to the economic health of business enterprises, that is in turn allied to exponentially-increasing industrial and technological capacities, this VET system of the early 21st century has had a most visible impact on changes in the senior phases of learning in secondary schools. It could be argued that this has happened because the VET system was established and ready to step into a breach that, at that time, the university had no

¹ "eligible options" is a term used to encompass all the various forms of full-time work that a 15 to 17 year-old may find.

imperative to recognise, much less to engage with². Historically, a non-compulsory senior phase of school learning occurred between the chronological ages of 15 to 17 and had one purpose and one purpose only – the preparation of a small, select number of students for entry into university or postcompulsory educational institutions such as teachers' colleges and/or institutes of technology.

In the meantime, multidimensional, complex and yet interconnected processes of globalization were at work in all systems of what has become an educational marketplace in which learning is brokered as a commodity (Harreveld, 2004). The VET system has given a brand name to an equivalency of qualifications for the senior phase of learning that previously did not exist. Statistical evidence from the Australian Council for Educational Research's longitudinal surveys of young people over the two decades of the 1980s and the 1990s has found that,

The percentage of students remaining to the final year of schooling rose from 35 per cent in 1980 to just over 73 per cent in 2001. Those who obtain a Year 12 qualification or its vocational equivalent are more likely to continue their involvement in education and training, gain employment-related skills and generally fare better in the labour market compared to those who do not complete Year 12 or its equivalent. (Fullarton, Walker, Ainley, & Hillman, 2003, p. vii)

Hence young people were perceived to be staying at school longer either because they did not have anything better to do (as low paid, manual labouring jobs decreased) and they received government allowances to stay studying; or because they were responding to societal expectations (including those of parents) that a senior certificate was indispensable for both employment and postcompulsory educational pathways. Yet not all young people were found to be buying into this new deal. Findings from the same series of longitudinal surveys commissioned by the Australian Council for Educational Research (McMillan &

Marks, 2003) suggest that young people with the following characteristics were less likely than other young people to complete the final year of secondary school (Year 12 in Queensland):

...males, indigenous Australians, those from low socio-economic status family backgrounds, from non-English-speaking backgrounds, those from non-metropolitan areas, from government schools, and with lower levels of literacy and numeracy. (p. ix)

Accordingly, the ETRF agenda could be viewed as a government's response to the numbers of "disengaged" youth who, for whatever reasons, are neither earning nor learning, with consequent perceptions that they are not participating in the civic life of a democratically-ordered society. Alternatively, disparities and inequalities of power and wealth distribution within our society could be viewed as contributing to the exclusions and distortions that these statistics represent.

This somewhat sceptical ambivalence can be applied to the VET system's claim that it is an "extended initial education" pathway of choice for young people. The Australian National Centre for Vocational Education Research noted that "one in four people aged 15 to 19 undertook ...VET...in 2002", with the statistics showing that "a growing number of young people choose VET as the first step towards their career" (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2003, Cover & Tables 1 and 2, p. 3). In the context of VET in schools (VETIS), this statistically-based claim has to be interpreted within an understanding that VET in schools refers to programs that are undertaken by school students as part of their senior secondary studies and that have the potential to lead to the award of a nationally-recognised VET qualification within the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) (Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board, 1998). Furthermore, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) (2003) found that,

Over 95 percent of Australia's secondary schools offering senior secondary programs now offer...VET...to their senior students. This means students can gain practical work skills and nationally recognised VET qualifications as part of their school education. (n.p.)

² The current and emerging role of the university and its relationship/s with other educational institutions is a "sleeper" issue in this whole ETRF agenda and will be examined through our continued research endeavours in this area.

This section has synthesised the political and policy dimension of “extended initial education” at a systemic level in Queensland. We turn now to present our research-based findings of how such “extended initial education” has been implemented at a local and regional level in five secondary schools. In doing so, we consider the implications for the practice of lifelong learning in this phase of educational provision, including the multiple responsibilities and contributions of stakeholders.

LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE PRACTICES OF “EXTENDED INITIAL EDUCATION”

Our research into the current postcompulsory pathways, constituted by vocational education delivery and school-to-industry links, focused on five government secondary schools in a Queensland regional community in the first half of 2003 (Harreveld, Kenny, & Danaher, 2003). The significance of the research findings was maximised by the fact that the district where the schools are located is a trial district for the implementation of the ETRF initiative (Queensland Government, 2002). Data included statistical information provided by the schools and the researchers’ semi-structured interviews

(yielding nearly 100,000 words of transcript) with 20 individuals in ten sites (the five schools, the District Office of Education Queensland and the workplaces of the four employer representatives who were interviewed). A major research finding was the complexity and diversity of school- and workplace-based offerings available to students, reflecting a genuine commitment to enhancing postcompulsory pathways for those students. This complexity and diversity were illustrated by the interconnected web of spheres of influence and relationships that schools have to negotiate and broker if the postcompulsory pathways are to survive, let alone flourish, as reflected in Figure 1.

What is striking about these sets of spheres of influence and relationships is the multiplicity of expectations and priorities that they represent. Students themselves, their parents and guardians and their peers might be assumed to have largely consonant goals, although this is not always the case. Small, medium, and large businesses are concerned primarily with maximising profits, although many also identify the training of the next generation of employees as important. Government and other funding agencies must

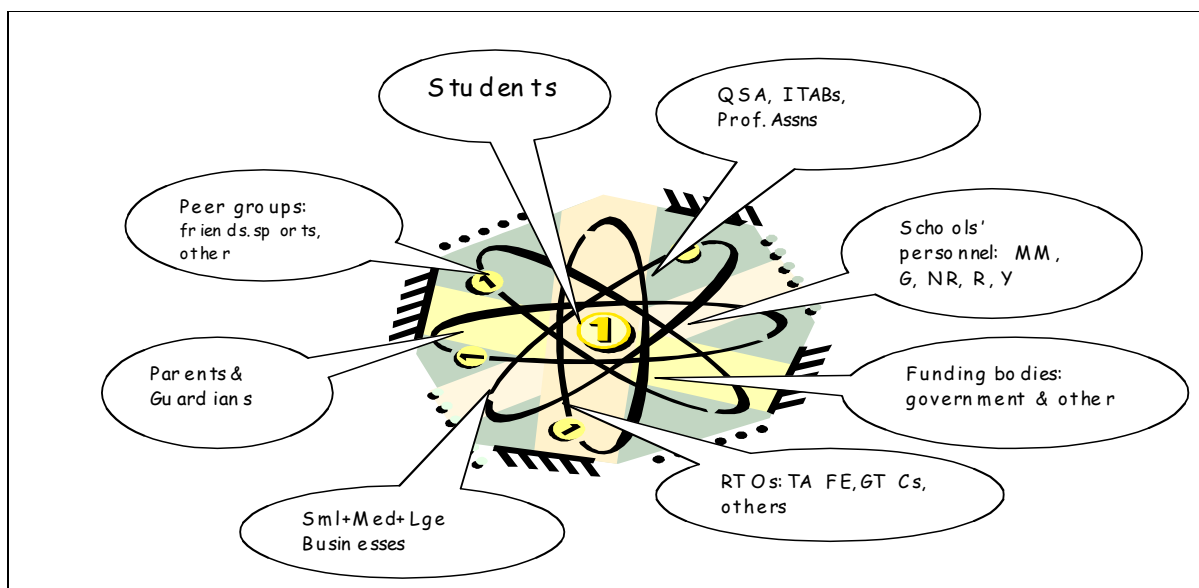


Figure 1. Spheres of influence and relationships in postcompulsory pathways.
(Harreveld, Kenny, & Danaher, 2003, p. 37)³

³ From “Bridges, roadblocks and degrees of ‘fit’: Final report in a situational analysis of senior secondary schooling – industry links and learning pathways among five ‘VET cluster’ state high schools in the Rockhampton District,” by R. E. Harreveld, M. D. Kenny, and P. A. Danaher, 2003. Copyright 2003 by Education Queensland Secondary School Principals, Rockhampton District, and Faculty of Education and Creative Arts, Central Queensland University. Reprinted with permission.

allocate scarce financial resources as effectively and efficiently as possible. The Queensland Studies Authority (QSA), Industry Training Advisory Boards (ITABs) and professional associations sometimes have difficulty reconciling very different expectations of schools and students. The same applies to Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Colleges, Group Training Companies (GTCs) and other Registered Training Organizations (RTOs). In many respects school personnel have the most arduous responsibilities in this situation. They are responsible for ensuring that students fulfil employer requirements in workplace placements without being exploited; that an appropriate balance between the utilitarian dimension of vocational education and other, less tangible elements of education is struck; and that all of this takes place in a context of scarce resources, particularly time. In combination, this means that it is impossible to identify particular stakeholders as being more powerful than others, although it is likely that at least some stakeholders perceive others exercising more influence than they have.

Gorard (2002) argued that, in Great Britain at least, “it remains the case that initial education has shown significant changes for the better” (p. 124), on the basis of the 20th century’s “considerable improvements in social inclusion and opportunities by gender, ethnicity, and class” (p. 124). Our research provides cautious endorsement of the application of this claim to Australia and, specifically, to Central Queensland. Nevertheless, as we contended in the conclusion to our research report, a crucial element of maximising the effectiveness of the “extended initial education” that we studied is the multiple and intersecting responsibilities of the diverse stakeholders who constitute this particular educational community.

What pathways are available for young people in the Rockhampton District [in regional Queensland] known as senior secondary school students in this twenty-first century? They are the people currently attending any one of the five state high schools, or the two affiliated ‘full service schools’. Some of them are working part-time while studying full-time; others are working and learning via formalised traineeships or apprenticeships. Some are doing a combination of OP-eligible [leading to university entrance] and VET embedded

or stand-alone VET [leading to vocational qualifications]. The pathways for young people have been cleared via legislation and policy frameworks that have removed many roadblocks. Curriculum frameworks are there in principle, but still need concerted effort in practice if they are to be meaningful bridges for students to access. The potential for students still to ‘fall through the cracks’ in any bridge to their future, or to be unable to surmount the roadblocks they encounter along the way, is all too apparent. We have found a complex mosaic of senior secondary school pathways which is not readily or easily understood by those charged with its implementation (such as teachers and administrators), much less by those intended to use it as students, parents/guardians, employers and other members of the community. (Harreveld, Kenny, & Danaher, 2003, p. 40)

This analysis suggests that the responsibilities and contributions of stakeholders required for this particular case of lifelong learning to be successful are as multiple, dynamic, and subject to ongoing change and challenge as are the spheres of influence and relationships that underpin and support them. This is no easy situation, and our research revealed several sources and sites of stress as individuals and groups sometimes found it difficult to adjust to this complex scenario. Nevertheless, there is no effective alternative; as one school VET coordinator pointed out, there is a fundamental need for understanding and acceptance of this form of “extended initial education”:

So I think that’s important – the perspective has to change. So that I think teachers have to see that this is a part of the kids’ schooling, and when they leave school it’s something that’s going to give them an added advantage...

This quotation signifies the grounded and material implications of such a change to “the perspective” on postcompulsory pathways. Just as the policy parameters of this phase of learning have had to change, so too the practices of what has become “extended initial education” have had to alter dramatically and fundamentally. By extension, this could mean that the maturational impact of the postcompulsory phase of learning is broader and deeper than the purely economic facets of the programs involved and that that

impact is crucial to successful further participation in lifelong-learning opportunities in any sense of this term.

CONCLUSION

Is there a space for reclaiming pedagogical encounters in which people – adults and adolescents – are lauded and rewarded for learning with and from one another? Based upon the findings from our research to date, we would respond in the affirmative, with a cautionary note that the political engagements reported here are necessary to generate spaces that respond to and express the challenges experienced by all participants in this endeavour – young people who are positioned as students, their teachers, employers, families, and significant others in their lives.

Clearly the Queensland Government's (2002) *Education and training reforms for the future* agenda has much to recommend it, particularly in terms of maximising the diversity and utility of postcompulsory pathways by means of enhancing VET delivery and school-to-industry links. At the same time, there are three possible pitfalls that have been documented in this paper: (i) the positioning of the senior phase of learning as subservient to the knowledge economy of the business world; (ii) a political agenda that seeks to "other" or make visible via their differences, only certain categories of young people; (iii) the financial, intellectual, and emotional costs of establishing and maintaining interconnecting spheres of influence and relationships to make postcompulsory pathways happen for young people. Our research (Harreveld, Kenny & Danaher, 2003) has identified the complex and multiple responsibilities to be discharged by all stakeholders if the ETRF agenda's transformative potential is to be realised.

Underpinning our analysis has been the deployment of Gorard's (2002) conceptualisation of "extended initial education". While we lack the space to take up his charge that "extended initial education" has been supported at the cost of "later learning" (something that we hope to develop in a separate paper), we conclude this account by noting and endorsing his "vision of lifelong learning which is valuable for its own sake and which may have benefits but whose *raison d'être* is...not primarily economic in nature". The complex and multiple responsibilities of stakeholders if such a vision is to be realised are as challenging as they

are crucial in rendering lifelong learning meaningful for all.

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DEVELOPING NURSING IDENTITIES THROUGH CURRICULUM CHANGE: SKILLING FOR THE FUTURE

Leone Hinton
Central Queensland University

ABSTRACT

Over the last ten years, nursing has become an increasingly diverse profession. The role and scope of practice for nurses is changing and being challenged, where nurses are no longer “just nurses”. This paper explores the multiple identities of nurses, and how generic skills need to be explicit in curricula. This is essential for the profession to respond in a dynamic and rapidly evolving health-care industry.

CRISES IN HEALTH AND, MORE SPECIFICALLY, NURSING

Like most professions, nursing has become increasingly diverse in a rapidly changing work environment. Currently, a gap exists between what nurses can do and what they are employed to do; between the education nurses obtain and the needs of the health environment in which nurses work. Nursing now deals with higher levels of illness acuity than ever before in both hospital and community settings. Historically, people would have died from certain illnesses but they are now being kept alive through advances in drugs, medical and surgical procedures, and technology. Despite these trends in morbidity and diverse differences in the education of nurses, 60 percent of nurses in the US today are employed in hospitals (Ward & Berkowitz, 2002). A similar trend is currently occurring in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2002). This means that the future trends of more home-care based health

and discipline segmentation are not directly addressed in curricula because of rigid structures and forces within the government, profession, and industry. The current diverse state of the nursing profession reflects powerful and synergistic forces that affect family and work life, politics, education, economics, and the system of health care. Yet these increasing levels of complexity and discipline segmentation require beginning nurses to be sound problems solvers, knowledge managers, critical thinkers, and skilled in generic nursing practices. Diversification is inevitable, and from this arises a crisis of identity in nursing and its practice. As a consequence, nursing reviews across the world have been commissioned to highlight the current state of the profession.

THE LITERATURE

Within the Australian nursing scene and across the world – more specifically, the United Kingdom and New Zealand – there has been a